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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study to determine whether Chamoru students at the University of Guam, evaluating a standardized self-esteem instrument, agree that the test does measure self-esteem. The instrument used is the Index of Self-Esteem (ISE) and was developed and normed in the United States. There can be a problem using instruments with populations that are not included in the norming group. Prior studies using Western developed and normed measures of self-esteem with non-western culture children, in general, show lower self-esteem with these non-western cultures as compared to the American children. The analysis of data indicated that the ISE has face validity for this population. Students in this sample had very clear pictures of a person with a high self-esteem and that the qualities stated were in agreement with that of the ISE. (Contains 15 references.) (JDM)

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Preliminary Exploration of Self-Esteem Construct: A Face Validity Study of the Index of Self-Esteem with a Chamoru University Student Sample

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Self-esteem Defined

Coopersmith (1967) defined self-esteem as:

> the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself: it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a *personal* judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds toward himself. It is a subjective experience which the individual conveys to others by verbal reports and other overt expressive behavior (p. 4-5).

According to Beane, Lipka, and Ludewig (1980) self-esteem is one of the components of self-perception. Self-perception has three dimensions: self-concept, self-esteem, and values. Self-concept refers to how we evaluate ourselves based on the roles we play and personal attributes; self-esteem refers to the level of satisfaction we affix to that evaluation; and our values affect our self-esteem in that we make decisions based on what is important to us (p. 84).

Cooley (1902) believed that individuals based their evaluation of themselves on the reaction of others toward them. He called this "the looking glass self" (p.136). The self-esteem of individuals is made up of the reflection they see of themselves in others' reactions to them resulting in good or bad feelings about themselves. These perceptions may then shape the individual's capabilities. For example, it has been postulated that a positive self-esteem is a viable ingredient in academic success (Coopersmith, 1967; Kaplan, 1995). It is individuals with high self-esteem who welcome challenges and are not easily frustrated. They can work independently, without constant supervision (Cooley, 1902; Morrow-Kleindl, 1990).

Culture and Self-esteem

According to Wood (1991), self-esteem is a cultural concept. There have been several studies done outside the Western culture on self-esteem. Chinese children who reside in China and those who moved to the United States of America have been given self-esteem measures for comparative analysis with American children. Based on Western measures of self-esteem, Chinese children in comparison to American children were less likely to believe their physical features were pleasing, felt they were unimportant members of their class and family, were uneasy meeting new people, and down rated their self-competence and self-worth. The Chinese children consistently had lower self-image than did the American children (Chiu, 1989; Stigler, Smith, & Mao, 1985; Turner, & Mo, 1984).

Research conducted with Australian and Japanese college students showed that cultural differences do influence decisional self-esteem (Radford, Mann, Ohta, & Nakane, 1993). Ando (1994) states that the Japanese view self as socially interdependent as compared to Americans' independent view of the self; to control one's emotions and get along well with others is a source of positive self-esteem for the Japanese.

A study done on Vietnamese Amerasians (Felsman, Johnson, Leong, & Felsman, 1989) indicated that Amerasians experienced high levels of general psychological distress and measured low in self-esteem. Porter, and Washington (1993) reviewed the theoretical models and the research done on self-esteem among Asian Americans, Hispanic, and African Americans and found that these studies fail to make a connection between group or personal self-esteem and sociocultural forces. In critiquing the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventories (Culture-Free SEI, Battle, 1992), Brooke (1995) concluded that the instrument may not be culture-free, e. g.,

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difficulty expressing one's feelings is measured as low self-esteem. However culturally, Asians generally do not express their feelings (D. W. Sue & D. Sue, 1990). Crocker, Lubtanen, Blaine, and Broadnax (1994) studied the psychological well-being and collective self-esteem of White, Black, and Asian college students and noted that research generally focuses on the individual self. On the other hand, minorities look at group membership as an important aspect of the self. American words used in instruments for self-esteem, when translated into the Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese terminologies, generally resulted in different connotations and thus affected the validity of the instrument (Ito, & Tashima, 1981). Muray (1996) found that African-American, Caucasian, Latina, and Chinese-American girls showed differences in their self-esteem with the African-American girls scoring the highest on the measures, followed by Latina, Caucasian, and the Chinese-American girls scoring the lowest.

Guam has its own share of studies on self-esteem. A study of Guam high school students on the relationship between career decisiveness and self-esteem was found to be significantly correlated, although, Guam students ranked in the intermediate to low levels in self-esteem (Uhlenhake-Thompson, 1993). Fourth, fifth, and sixth grade Filipino students scored significantly higher on self-esteem after learning more about their culture than those in the control group (Miller, 1982). There is a statistically significant positive correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement with seventh and eighth grade Guam students (Jessee-Jones, 1995). When looking only at the Chamoru and Filipino samples, self-esteem and academic achievement variables were not significantly correlated. They were, however, for the Asian samples.

The Island of Guam, the Chamoru Culture and the University of Guam

Guam is located in the Micronesia region between Hawaii and the Philippine Islands. The indigenous people of Guam are called Chamorus. The indigenous culture has been modified through centuries of Spanish control followed by American possession since 1898, which was interrupted briefly by the Japanese occupation of the island during WWII. The Chamorus are a tightly knit community who value group cohesiveness rather than individualism. Family problems are kept within the functional family unit which includes the nuclear family plus the grandparents, uncles, aunts, and different relations. To do otherwise is considered being disrespectful to the family. Recognizing ones own abilities publicly is frowned upon and is regarded as evidence of conceit and excessive self-importance. The birth of a child, a marriage, and a death in the family are all greeted with a special ceremony which includes members of the island community. The Chamorus assist each other in these ceremonies and celebrations by helping the family prepare the food, or donate food or money. All of these activities operate to reinforce bonds between the extended family members and across broader segments of the community.

The University of Guam (UOG) is a public Land Grant institution and has the mission of serving the people of Guam and the Western Pacific region. UOG grants baccalaureate and master's degrees similar to those of other universities. The student population, approximately 3,500, is multicultural, consisting of students from Guam, the Philippines, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, the Continental United States, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Belau, the Republic of the Marshalls, Korea, Japan, and China. The sample for this study was Chamoru students from UOG.

Self-Esteem and Ethnic Identity

Studies show a positive relationship existed between ethnic identity and self-esteem among Black adolescents (Paul, & Fischer, 1980). Similar relationships exist among Anglo-American and Mexican-American junior high school students (Grossman, Wirt, & Davids, 1985). In contrast, no relationship was found between ethnic identity and self-esteem in a study on Black and White college students (White, & Burke, 1987) and Italian Australians (Rosenthal, & Cichello, 1986). Based on the stage model of ethnic identity, studies showed that Asian-American, Black, Mexican-American, and White adolescents and college students with higher

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stages of ethnic identity have higher self-esteem than those with lower stages of ethnic identity (Phinney, 1989; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990).

Phinney (1990, 1991) opined that ethnic identity is essential to the psychological functioning and self-esteem of ethnic minority groups. He extensively reviewed the research on ethnic identity in adolescents and adults and concluded that reliable and valid measures of ethnic identity need to be devised.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether Chamoru students evaluating a standardized self-esteem instrument, developed and normed in the U.S., agree that it does measure self-esteem. The instrument used in this study is the Index of Self-Esteem (ISE, Hudson, 1974). There is a problem using instruments with populations that are not included in the norming group. Studies using Western developed and normed measures of self-esteem with non-western culture children, in general, show low self-esteem with these non-western cultures as compared to the American children (Chiu, 1989; McDaniel, & Soong, 1981; Radford, Mann, Ohta, & Nakane, 1993; Stigler, Smith, & Mao, 1985; Turner, & Mo, 1984).

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of 50 University of Guam student volunteers from an Introduction to Psychology class. The majority of the sample were freshman students (66%) and sophomores (22%). The college major most frequently identified was Education (30%), followed by 26% of the students who were "Undecided." The rest of the sample identified majors from 10 other fields. The mean age of the sample was 19.66 years with a standard deviation of 3.46. The age ranged from 17 to 37 years with only one person over 29 years. There was approximately equal representation of men and women as reported by the survey administrator.

Measures

The instrument consisted of three parts with parts one and two developed locally. The first part dealt with demographic information; the second defined self-esteem and then instructed the participants to (a) describe a person with high or positive self-esteem; and to (b) describe a person with low or negative self-esteem. The third part of the instrument was the Index of Self-Esteem (ISE, Hudson, 1974).

The ISE was modified for this study. The participants were instructed to rate how each item relates generally to self-esteem using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (no relation to self-esteem) to 5 (definitely relates to self-esteem) and to explain their responses after each item. The original ISE instructed participants to rate themselves on each item from 1 (rarely or none of the time) to 5 (most or all of the time). The purpose of modifying the ISE was to address the issue of validity with respect to self-esteem as judged by a student subgroup belonging to the Chamoru culture.

Procedure

The ISE was administered to student volunteers from the Introduction to Psychology class during three different administrations outside their scheduled class time. Students were given verbal instructions on all three parts of the instrument before they began. All volunteers were given the ISE regardless of their ethnicity. A total of 138 students participated, 50 of whom identified themselves as Chamorus. The ISEs of the 50 Chamoru students were selected for analysis in this study.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Research question: Is there agreement among the Chamoru students that the standardized self-esteem instrument, ISE, developed and normed in America does indeed measure self-esteem with the Chamoru sample? The analysis of data indicated that it is valid for this population. The mean, standard deviation, and the rank of all 25 ISE items are found on Table 1 (see Appendix). The mean score of 19 of the items ranged between 4.02 to 4.72. These scores were on the high

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end of the Likert scale which is an indicator that the students believed the ISE items strongly relate to self-esteem. The highest mean score was item 3 (4.72) followed by items 10 (4.60) and 11 (4.60). Item 12 had the lowest mean score (3.10) and, although the mode was a 5, only 26% of the students selected it as such. The mode for 21 of the items was a 5 (definitely relates to self-esteem). Consistent with the findings, using frequency distribution, over 70% of the subjects selected items 3, 10, and 11 as being closely related to self-esteem.

Content Analysis of ISE Items

The comments given for each item indicated that the students understood the objective of the study, i.e., to rate each ISE item relative to self-esteem. To illustrate this point, example items are described in this section to include: (a) the three with the highest mean scores (items 3, 10, 11); and (b) the eight with potential cultural differences (items 19, 24, 12, 4, 5, 7, 22, 25).

On item number three, "I feel that I am a beautiful person", the general comments were that if people see themselves as beautiful, they believe others will also see them as beautiful, and as a result, think positively about themselves. All comments indicated that students identified this statement as closely relating to positive self-esteem.

On the opposite side of beauty, is item number 11, "I feel ugly." Students' remarked that if people perceive themselves as ugly, they will think people see them as such. Feeling ugly indicates a rejection of oneself and a low self-esteem. "If you feel ugly about yourself your esteem will be lowered." Of the 50 students, 82% wrote comments and all their remarks suggested that a person who feels ugly has negative self-esteem.

Closely related to perception of ugliness is item number 10, "I think I am a dull person." The respones point to the idea that people may think negatively of themselves. "When one thinks they are dull, they put themelves down which is definitely related to their overall impression of themselves." The rest of the comments reflected that people who think they are dull have low self-esteem.

Comments made on eight particular items may reflect potential problems due to cultural differences. First, number 19 reads, "I feel like a wall flower when I go out", 22% of the students indicated they did not know the meaning of the term "wall flower." This is a culturally specific term. There may be a higher percentage who did not know the term but declined to declare it.

Second, in response to item 24, "I am afraid I will appear foolish to others", 20% of the students indicated that this item may not be seen as clearly related to the concept of self-esteem. Comments include: "Doesn't explain that this person has a positive or negative self-esteem (feeling) about themselves"; "Everyone is afraid to be foolish around others for fear of a put down."

Third, in item 12, "I feel that others have more fun than I do", students argued that it was not apparent how this item is identified with self-esteem. "Based on experience. Doesn't really deal with self-esteem. Concept of you having fun doesn't show if you lack or have confidence in yourself"; "The level of fun is dependent on individual likes, dislikes and other factors unrelated to self-esteem."

On the fourth through the eighth items, a handful of students considered the items relating to self-esteem but indicated that a person who rated themselves high on them have negative character traits. They are the following: number 4, "When I am with other people I feel they are glad I am with them"; number 5, "I feel that people really like to talk with me"; number 7, "I think I make a good impression on others"; number 22, "I feel that people really like me very much"; and number 25, "My friends think very highly of me." Students declared that people rating themselves high on these items are egotistical, are a bore, and are conceited. "High esteem! Very egotistical but can go well in life"; "One self-conceited statement"; "Tends to shift towards self-obsession (big head)."

Supplemental Questions

In the analysis of this data, the remarks of the students were grouped according to like responses describing a person with high or positive self-esteem; and one with low or negative self-esteem.

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Students described people with high self-esteem as those who have a positive outlook on life and self. They are optimistic, confident in things they do, and comfortable with who they are and where they are in life. High self-esteem individuals exude happiness, are friendly, and enjoy the company of others. These individuals have good feelings about themselves and the way they look. They are highly motivated, value and believe in themselves, and are not afraid to speak their mind.

Students described people with low or negative self-esteem as those who have a negative attitude about themselves or life. They often are depressed, insecure, do not feel good about themselves, and do not like themselves. People with low self-esteem do not talk to others; they are introverted, shy, and quiet isolating themselves from others. These individuals continually put themselves down, are always worried about how people see them, and are extremely self conscious.

For both high and low self-esteem, students gave some descriptions consistent with the ISE items and some that were not. Descriptions that were consistent with the ISE for high self-esteem were confidence in self; possess a positive outlook on life; feels good about self and the way one looks; and not afraid to speak one's mind. Descriptions consistent with the ISE for low self-esteem include putting self down and making negative statements of self.

Discussion

Implications

The Chamoru students all agreed that the ISE does relate to self-esteem, as they understood it. This suggests that the ISE can be used to measure the self-esteem of Chamoru students.

According to the results of the study, feeling beautiful or ugly are very strong indicators of whether a person's self-esteem is positive or negative. The students' views were split almost evenly between the idea of beauty as a physical attribute versus an inner quality. Students did not identify feeling ugly as being physically ugly, but rather as a perception from within. Perhaps if the study had older participants these two items might not have been rated so highly.

Students' descriptions of people with high or low self-esteem showed general agreement with the ISE. This may suggest a more Western understanding of self-esteem influenced by pursuing a degree. It could mean that self-esteem is a universal construct that spans culture.

The following are some sources of potential cultural bias within the ISE: (a) semantic credibility of the Index, e. g., the use of the term wall flower is not an expression in the Chamoru culture so its concept was not understood; (b) some student indicated that the ability to have fun did not relate to self-esteem, as fun is transient in nature, not relating to self-esteem which is more enduring; (c) appearing foolish seems to some as being the same as losing face, which in the Chamoru culture has heightened importance as has been noted for Asians (D. W. Sue & D. Sue, 1990); (d) the notion that friends think highly of them, which in the Western culture is desirable and denotes positive self-esteem, is associated by some with conceit and egoism.

Limitations of the Study

The sample primarily consisted of freshmen college students with the mean age of 19.66. A sample including older subjects may give a more accurate picture of whether there is broad agreement or not with a standardized (Western) measure of self-esteem. The study was conducted with only college students. Perhaps a sample which included non-college students would yield different results. The Chamoru students who participated in the study may not be representative of the general Chamoru population.

Since the focus of the study was to see how the ethnic group, Chamorus, would respond to the ISE, gender was not an issue. The results of the study could be expanded further if gender were identified. Caution is advised in using the results of the study with other ethnic groups and with Chamorus outside the University of Guam.

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Conclusion and Recommendations

For a more through analysis of data, the following information about the participants would be helpful: birth place; years of residence in Guam; ethnicity of both parents'; name of village; language(s) spoken. It is recommended that future studies include older age group and Chamorus outside UOG for more conclusive evidence validating a standardized (Western) measure of self-esteem. It is also recommended that another instrument be used which measures different aspects of self-esteem.

In conclusion, this exploratory study was conducted to determine whether Chamoru students appear to understand self-esteem in a fashion that supports the face validity of the self-esteem construct presented by the ISE. The analysis of data indicated that the ISE has face validity for this population. The study also showed that the students in this sample had very clear pictures of a person with a high self-esteem and one with a low self-esteem and that the qualities stated were in agreement with that of the ISE.

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